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As part of her studies of world civilizations, Abigail Erkes is learning that the ones that survived were those with a strong army.

"Everyone has to fight for their freedom," Abigail said.

Abigail was able to make her support for the American army tangible when she heard in December about a trip to Iraq planned by U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk, R-10th.

"We had heard over the radio that Congressman Kirk was going to bring letters to the troops. I decided I wanted to send a newsletter, and I felt bad for those troops who didn't have family members who weren't getting letters," explained Erkes, who lives in Bristol Estates with her middle school brother, Eli, and her parents, Sally and Andy.

"She's a compassionate child," said Sally of her daughter.

Abigail is an articulate and poised child with waist-length hair who is home schooled by her mother, Sally. Sally left a 20-year career in marketing to be a stay-at-home mother.

On hearing the announcement, Abigail set to work on her computer, carefully designing an update note to send to the soldiers in Iraq. "Hello Troops! Happy Holidays to you, Here are some fun things to do!" it reads.

Following the heading are poems and puzzles that Abigail wrote herself, including Julius Caesar's famous quote, "Veni vidi vici" for "I came, I saw, I conquered."

As part of her lessons, Abigail is studying Latin, in addition to French, Greek, Roman History, mythology, poetry, and mathematics.

The Erkes home is just a stone's throw away from Kirk's office on Wilmot Road, so mother and daughter delivered 175 letters to his office.

Abigail's contribution was part of 1,600 letters the congressman brought over to Iraq in December, Kirk's press secretary Matt Towson said. Towson said the letter drive was organized because the deadline for getting letters overseas by the holidays had already passed.

Abigail is taking her efforts to support American troops one step further. She has ordered a shipment of bracelets that say "Support the troops" to hand out to the families who have sons or daughters in Iraq.

Abigail hopes to find out the names of local family members of servicemen and women from Kirk's office

"If they feel insecure about what their children are doing, it will show support," Abigail said.

The bracelets are being donated by ARA Collectibles in Cherry Hill, N.J.

Abigail's mother said the idea was inspired by the popularity of similar bracelets. The company also donated 150 American flag pins.

Abigail's support for the troops is unwavering. She maintains it is vital for the nation to show it is strong.

Her newsletter to the soldiers included a quote from Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower: "History does

not long entrust the care of freedom to the weak or the timid."